

Summary of July 16 City Focus Group – Washington, DC

To begin the focus group, cities were given an opportunity to share some of their recent accomplishments. These accomplishments included:

- **Austin**, Texas: The city now has 85 Rehab units, 50 for the homeless and 35 for low-income families.
- **Long Beach**, California: The city announced that their first pilot SRO was approved.
- **Anchorage**, Alaska: The Homeward Bound program, which targets “drunks” picked up 40 times or more, now has 7 permanent homeowners among its graduates.
- **San Francisco**, California: Direct Access Housing Program, which serves individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, has achieved a 70% retention rate.
- **New York**, New York: The city now has a data management system to track individuals in their shelters. They are projecting that over 600 families will be housed by the end of the fiscal year, a 60% improvement over last year.
- **Los Angeles**, California: The Mayor along with the city council has extended the “cold weather season” to keep 865 beds operational year round.
- **Indianapolis**, Indiana: The news media’s perspective on their city’s efforts to end homelessness have flipped from negative to positive.
- **Hartford**, Connecticut: A 10-Year Plan to end homelessness will soon be going to the Mayor for review.
- **Portland**, Oregon: The city recently pledged to develop 400 new housing units as a part of the CSH/Robert Wood Johnson foundation project.
- **Oakland**, California: The city’s Mobile Homeless Services moved 60 people directly into permanent housing.

Presentations

Horace Sibley: Atlanta, Georgia

Horace Sibley spoke on his experience in developing Atlanta’s 10-Year Plan. Mayor Franklin asked Sibley to head a commission that would develop a “fundable” and attainable plan to end chronic homelessness in Atlanta. An exceptional commission was assembled with high-level representation from many stakeholder groups, including the business and faith-based communities. Public hearings were also integrated into the process to allow for broader public input. Under the leadership of Sibley, the commission devised 3 working groups:

- 1) Chronic Homelessness – Mental Disability,
- 2) Chronic Homelessness – Tenancy, and 3) Temporary Homelessness.

Within 90 days, the commission had 29 recommendations ready for the Mayor's review. The Mayor held a press conference to announce the plan, and personally introduced the plan and fielded subsequent questions.

The Mayor prioritized seven projects for immediate implementation:

1) 24/7-service center, 2) transitional housing, 3) supportive services, 4) permanent supportive housing, 5) prevention, 6) reunification, and 7) discharge. In addition, the city encouraged the development of the Shelter-A-Family program, a faith based effort to provide a back-up safety net for families.

Mitchell Netburn and Leepi Shimkhada: Los Angeles

On any given night, there are approximately 84,000 homeless people in Los Angeles. Despite the magnitude of the problem, homelessness does not affect the average citizen, as the majority of the homeless are clustered in the isolated area known as "Skid Row". Netburn and Shimkhada spoke of the successful collaboration between the City and homeless providers that was started by Bob Erlenbusch of the Los Angeles Coalition and Mitchell Netburn of the Los Angeles Homelessness Services Authority. Despite significant political challenges, the Coalition and the Homelessness Services Authority both are committed to the partnership. They have effectively leveraged the relationship to engage other companies and community organizations in their efforts to end homelessness in Los Angeles. Together the partnership was able to sell their idea as community economic development to Washington Mutual.

George Smith, Dariush Kayhan & Marc Trotz: San Francisco

The third presentation focused on the idea of coordination at the city level. Kayhan, Director of the Department of Housing and Human Services; Trotz, who works with Direct Access to Housing with the Health Department; and Smith, Director of the Mayor's Office on Homelessness, all shared their experiences with working together to overcome "City Agency-to-City Agency Silos".

The homelessness problem in San Francisco is large. The City performed an "unscientific" street count, it found 8000 people on the streets and 4000 in facilities. 49% of the people served by the City's homeless programs are African-American men.

Smith believes that the racial dimension of homelessness must be discussed and addressed and that engaging particular racial communities can be critical to the success of efforts to end homelessness.

Smith has used his experiences and perspectives as a formerly homeless individual to encourage city officials to collaborate and overcome agency silos to develop innovative partnerships and programs to address homelessness. Under his leadership, San Francisco has redirected shelter monies to fund permanent housing solutions and encouraged, broader community input and involvement in homeless policies.

Linda Gibbs and Maryanne Schretzman: Street Counts in New York City

The idea of homeless street counts in New York City initially met with considerable resistance from many different parties, who maintained that ignorance was the best route. Advocates thought that the process would be dangerous, irresponsible, and expensive. They believed that no methodology was sufficient and that any count would underestimate the street population leading to negative policy implications. However, Gibbs and Schretzman felt that understanding the magnitude of the problem was the critical first step needed to begin to address it. They decided to begin their counts locally (with a random sample) and replicate annually.

The first count found 1780 unsheltered individuals (i.e. chronically homeless or service resistant); 220 were in the subway system and 1560 were on the street. In addition 8900 single adults were counted in shelters. There were no families or children on the streets. Although this count is just the first step, having even a rough estimate of the population will allow New York City to be more targeted in its policies and strategies on homelessness.

Although many critics maintained that counts would be prohibitively expensive, New York's experience suggests otherwise. The city recruited 800 volunteers for the count, and as Commissioner Gibbs attested, the only costs were for "Dunkin Donuts and bottled water".

Robert Hess: Philadelphia

Philadelphia wants to be the first city in America to end street homelessness and has found that weekly street counts are an integral part of its strategy to achieve this goal. Hess is the Deputy Managing Director for Special Needs Housing in Philadelphia

Four years ago, counts reported 824 homeless individuals. In June and July of this year, the numbers were down to 95 and 131, respectively. Using data from the counts, the city maps where individuals congregate and works to address their needs. The city has decided that arresting the homeless will not fix the problem, and has instead partnered the police with Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams to engage individuals on the streets and move them into permanent supported housing. They have established the ambitious goal of

placing 5 people per month into permanent housing, and believe that this approach will be effective in eliminating chronic homelessness in Philadelphia.

Hess is quick to point out that collaboration and partnership have been integral to the city's success. "Silos are not allowed in the city; mention the word and you can be banished to the suburbs."

ICH Executive Director Mangano thanked the City of Washington and Sue Marshall, Executive Director of the Community Partnership who represented the city at the meeting, for providing the meeting site.